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## THE RELIGIOUS TRAINING OF CHILDREN.

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THE study of the child is coming to be the deepest study of science; and the nurture of the child ought to be the profoundest concern of religion. One of America's foremost preachers, pleading for a better chance for the children, says: "Formerly the world asked, What do teachers know about arithmetic, grammar, geography, etc.? but now the inquiry is also, What do teachers know about children?" Mary Lyon has left this sentiment on record: "A young woman is not properly educated until she has had some experience in teaching children. In no other way can one come so well to understand the human mind and heart. Prepare thoroughly for every exercise, but study the children more than any book."

The way to the development of childhood is along the line of some activity. We are to "train up the child in the way he should go." He is sure to "go" some way. We are to keep the children in motion under some splendid banner, and we must give them some stirring watchword. Child-training is first and foremost a culture in movement. The child is not a thinker, but an actor. President A. R. Taylor declares that "movement and muscular control are the only things worth striving for in the child's earlier years." This may be an over-statement, but it carries a great truth—a truth that indicates at once the *method* of child education. If the child's specialty is movement, our educational task—and our religious task, too—is only to keep the child in motion in the right direction. Our work is not the suppression, but the superintendence, of child impulse. Even piety in the child is to be developed, not through preaching, but through supervision in religious activity—through leading the child reverently in the way he should go.

The question of method has been largely answered by the kindergarten. The true kindergarten is a training school in

right movement. Its purpose is the spontaneous expression of young life in healthy and helpful activity. It combines manual training with training in manners. It finds the children always in motion: it meets them on the run, and runs with them, keeping always enough in advance to turn their little feet out of danger into duty, courtesy, and kindliness.

The children must play; that is one of God's decrees. Perhaps the greatest thing the kindergarten teaches us is how to turn the plays of children to some practical and spiritual account. The only way to get a child to work is to let him play at it. Like the lily, the child will not toil. The child works at his play; but he will not work at anything he cannot turn into play. The kindergarten turns a large number of serious things into play; and then it lifts all play up into a discipline and a service for life. Children will do nothing which they cannot fill with imagination and romance. It is not duty that the child fears; it is only drudgery. Give duty an air of chivalry, and you will find the ordinary child ready for all sorts of moral adventure.

We shall find the child ready for worship, if we will only let him begin worship as a sort of mythology. The child lives in a world of things rather than of thoughts. His devotions must necessarily begin as a kind of nature-worship. He learns by object-lessons. We are not to be surprised if, like primitive man, he worships even sticks and stones. He is sure to worship the sun, the moon, and the stars; and we must live so that he can worship us. Thus nature-worship will pass into hero-worship. The child is bound to have a realistic and graphic religion. Hamilton Mabie says: "The discovery of the world to the imagination marks the beginning of art and religion, for the immediate fruit of that discovery was mythology, and in mythology is to be found the first attempt of man to pass beyond observation . . . imputing personality and will to inanimate things." With the child, as with primitive man, the way of approach to deity is through nature up to nature's God. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." The child has to learn worship as the race learned worship in the dawn of history. He will begin with

wonder about the mystery of things. His imagination will make everything live. To him the world will be a great pantheon. He will see gods and goddesses everywhere. He will have his own mythology, which will be his first stage in the spiritual interpretation of the universe. We are only to help him to unify his varied feelings into a vital sense of the one eternal spiritual presence. The child will in due time find a God who is more than nature; but he can only find the true God through nature, and never apart from nature. At first he can worship only through natural objects, or symbols. It is fatal to the development of worship in the child to try to abstract his God from the world of symbolism. His only world is the symbolic world, and if God be not in that, he can have no God. We must help him to make God live in the things he sees, and soon nature will become for him, not only the symbol, but also the tabernacle of the almighty presence.

The child will welcome a religion that makes him marvel, but he will scout a religion that tries to make him mope. He must be allowed to take his playthings from the nursery to the sanctuary; or, rather, the sanctuary must be made a nursery on a grander scale, and the nursery must be made a sanctuary by spiritualizing its playthings. The normal child will have nothing to do with a worship that is somber and sanctimonious. But make religious symbols so many celestial playthings, and he can be led to worship with a relish. It will not be long before he will come forward out of the methods of a little pagan, and, like Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees, will become a monotheist, and, while clinging to many forms and symbols, will develop into real spiritual worship, and become one of God's chosen people. The Hebrews could not be graduated all at once from mere nature-worship to unalloyed spirituality. While they came to recognize but one God, their immaturity still required the graphic symbolism of altars and sacrifices, of incense and sacred fire, of shewbread and candlesticks, of tabernacle and temple. Today the immaturity of the child demands the scientific symbolism of the Christian kindergarten.

To nature-worship the race in its youth added hero-worship;

in fact, it has not forgotten to worship heroes today. Children are specialists at hero-worship. We know why it is that the Old Testament stories have such perennial fascination for children. They bring to view in vivid colors the heroes of the world's surpassing religious struggle. And then these stories lead the child up to the story that surpasses all—the story of the Hero of Calvary. Nature-worship—hero-worship—these mark the early ascent of the race toward God; and God's way with the race must be our way, under God, with the child. What is called the law of recapitulation seems to be well established. Before birth the child's life recapitulates the lower stages of animal development; after birth his life recapitulates the stages of the earlier development of the race. Christian nurture must run parallel to this law of nature, and must construct its method so that nature and grace will work together. We are to train up the child, not in our adult way, but in the way *he* should—in the way peculiar and proper to child life.

The impressions received in childhood abide for life. It is now believed that almost without exception the stamp of life-long character is received during the period of adolescence. Recently a noted European artist made an exhaustive canvass to ascertain when and how the awakening of artistic genius begins. He inquired of the leading art specialists on the continent. This is his conclusion: "The great artist caught his inspiration in youth, in his adolescent years." And we may add, the great prophet, the great saint, must catch his inspiration in youth, in his adolescent years. Another distinguished investigator, after careful study, reaches the same conclusion, and says: "The great artist is he who can best conserve the feelings youth has toward nature." And we may add, the great saint is he who can best conserve the feelings youth has toward God. It is probable that the trend of the first fifteen years of life determines, not only life's career, but its character as well. Although great changes may come later, the forces that bring them about will be found to reach back into these earlier years. In these years nature must make the artist; and nature and grace must make the man. If there be no awakening in these years, neither genius nor godliness will glorify maturer life.